



KNOW YOUR PLACE

Getting from A to B is easier and more fun with a map website. Whether you want a local destination or a trip to the moon, Jane Hoskyn can point you in the right direction

Map websites are a whole lot more than just online versions of paper A-Zs. They can help you find your way, provide reams of information about where you're going and what you'll be doing when you get there, and even provide local weather forecasts. In this article, we show you what you can do with maps on the internet, how to tailor your searches and how to make sure you get the most from each service.

We'll cover everything you need to know about the big and comprehensive Google Maps site. And if Google Maps doesn't provide exactly what you are looking, you can try one of the other 10 online services in our round-up.

GOOGLE MAPS

1 GET A GOOGLE ACCOUNT

Many of the most useful features of Google Maps, such as the ability to save lists of your most recent searches and the customisable My Maps tool, are available only if you're signed into a free Google account. If you use Google Mail, you already have a Google account. You'll just need to click on the Sign In link at the top-right of any Google Maps page. To create a new account, go to the secure page at www.google.com/accounts/NewAccount and enter the

requested information. Then click on the Maps link on your Google Accounts page, or go straight to <http://maps.google.co.uk>.

2 GET TARGETED RESULTS

When you search for a map on Google Maps, give as much specific information as you can to get the most focused map. For example, typing 'Oxford Street, London' (without the quote marks) into the search box just shows a map of central London, while '100 Oxford Street, London W1' shows a map of Oxford Street itself. Where possible, you should enter a street number or a postcode.

3 FASTER EXPLORATION

Think of Google Maps as an enormous map of the world in which you move around. You don't have to wait for whole pages to reload if you want to view adjacent areas. To explore this vast map with the greatest ease, you should ignore the up/down and zoom icons onscreen and just use your mouse. To move around, click on the map, hold down the left button and drag your mouse. To zoom in you double-click, and to zoom out double-right-click.

You can save even more time by navigating with your keyboard. Use the arrow keys to pan left, right, up and down. To pan out even wider

use the Page Up, Page Down, Home and End keys. Use the '+' key to zoom in and '-' key to zoom out.

4 FIND ROUTES FASTER

Ignore the Get directions link below the Google Maps search box. There are quicker ways to discover your best route. Run a normal map search for a location and a pop-up bubble will appear. Then click on To here or From here. Type another location and click Go. The page will reload to show a map with the driving route highlighted in purple, plus step-by-step directions in a column on the left. Click on one of these steps to see more details.

Another short cut to getting directions is to use the word 'to' (without quotes) in the Google Maps search box. Simply type your start location, then 'to', and finally enter your destination – so, for example, type '100 Oxford Street London W1 to Fourth Avenue Harlow Essex' (without quotes).

You can use the 'to' several times to generate a route that includes a number of specific stops. However, to avoid confusing Google, use 'from' and colons as well. Rather than typing 'Oxford Street to Harlow to Cambridge', enter 'from: Oxford Street to: Harlow to: Cambridge'.



To see a journey and its steps in reverse, click on Get reverse directions at the top of the column on the left.

5 TWEAK YOUR JOURNEY

Once Google has loaded a purple line to show your way from A to B, you're free to edit it. Just click and drag the line at any point to avoid, or follow, certain roads. When you drag the purple line, Google re-creates the directions on both the map and on the left panel, and updates the estimated time and distance.

6 STAY AWAY FROM MOTORWAYS

If you've got some directions but you'd rather not deal with motorways, click on the Avoid highways box at the top of the left-hand column. The route and steps will immediately reload without any motorways included.

7 SEARCH USING COORDINATES

Google Maps allows you to search using latitude and longitude coordinates. For example, typing '52.470000, -1.110000' (without quotes) in the search box takes you to Walton near Rugby.

8 FIND YOUR NEAREST BUSINESS

Enter the type of business you want to locate, or the name of the business you're looking for, such as pizza or Pizza Express, plus the word 'in' or 'near' (without quotes), along with a location. Google shows a map annotated with information from ThomsonLocal.com. For example, 'Pizza Express near Oxford Street, London' shows a map of central London with lots of red markers to represent Pizza Express branches and similarly named businesses. Click on one of the markers to see a pop-up containing address information and links for directions.

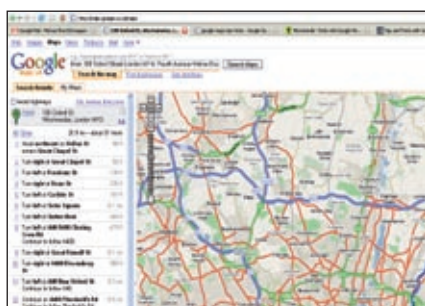
Click on the More info link in the description bubble. If other Google users have reviewed that business, their reviews and ratings will open in a pop-up window, which includes links for relevant webpages and online photos. To contribute your own review, click on the Write a review link in the pop-up bubble.

9 LINK TO A MAP

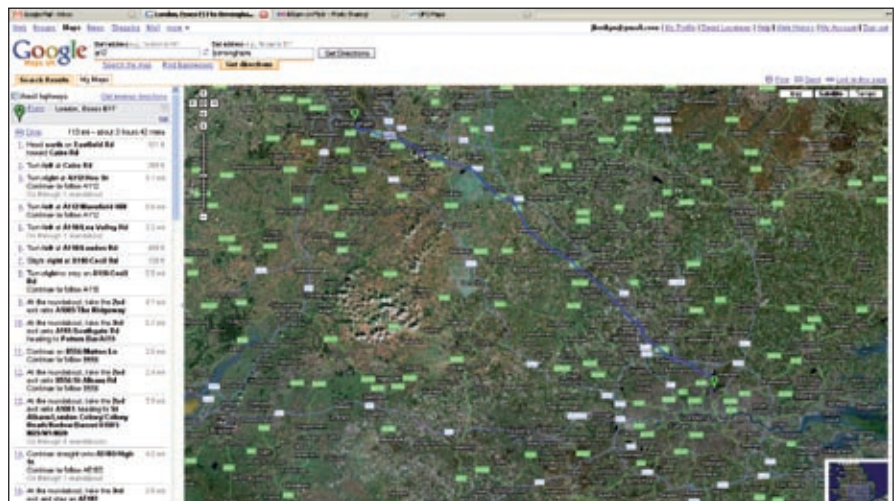
To save the web address of a specific map (or business location, or set of directions), click on 'Link to this page' at the top-right corner of the map. Copy and paste the web address into an email or other text document. A quicker way to send a link by email is to click on the Send link. This opens your default email application with the map link included in the message body.

10 EMBED A MAP IN YOUR WEBSITE

You can take the whole interactive map and paste it into your website or blog. Click on the 'Link to this page' link. Copy the HTML code



▲ Google Maps includes a handy route planner



▲ To see how an area looks from the sky, just click on the Satellite button in Google Maps

in the second text box and paste it into the source code of your site. You can adjust the size of the map before you embed it. Just click on 'Customise and preview embedded map' below the HTML text box and select your preferred size to see a preview. If you're happy, copy the HTML code given in the preview window.

11 GET A SATELLITE VIEW

Photos taken from the sky offer an alternative and fascinating way to explore an area. Simply search for a location as usual and click on the Satellite link at the top-right corner of the map to see a satellite image overlaid with map information. Google's satellite images are current, but they aren't real-time. You can use your mouse or keyboard short cuts to explore satellite images by panning and zooming, just as with normal Google maps. To switch back to the normal map view, click on the Map link at the top-right corner of the map.

12 CHECK OUT THE TERRAIN

To see how hilly an area is, search for a map then click on the Terrain link at the top-right corner of the map. Elevated areas are shaded. Street names and other information are also included. As yet, there's no hybrid terrain/map or terrain/satellite view.

13 SAVE YOUR SEARCH HISTORY

Keep track of the maps and directions you've searched for by clicking on the Saved Locations link at the top-right of any Google Maps page. Once you're signed in with your Google account, each map or set of directions you generate is saved, up to a total of 100 maps.

On the Saved Locations page, you can edit or delete maps or directions from your saved list, customise your locations by adding labels to them, set or change your default location, or enable or disable auto-saving of your searches.

14 USE MY MAPS

The new My Maps feature allows you to personalise maps with notes and share them with friends. Click on the My Maps tab below the Google Maps search box. Click on Create New Map, give your map a title and description, and choose whether the map should be Public or viewable only by the people to whom you've sent its web address. Search for a location, and use the icons above the map to draw lines and add markers containing notes.

When you add a marker to My Map, a window pops up allowing you to type in descriptive text. You can make lists and insert links (remember to include the <http://> in web addresses) and even add images. To add an image, upload a digital photo to a free hosting service such as Photobucket (www.photobucket.com) and copy and paste the HTML link it gives you. You can edit or delete a marker at any time. Just click on it and select Edit or Delete. You can also change a marker's position by clicking on it and dragging it to a new location.

Sharing your customised My Maps is just like sharing a map you've found using Google Maps. Use the Send or 'Link to this page' links at the top-right of the map. To change a My Map from public to private, or vice versa, click on the map's name and then click Edit. Select Public to let anyone view it and Unlisted to make it private.

15 KEEP IT ALL TOGETHER

You can set up a Google Maps user profile page as a handy one-stop shop for all your search results and customised My Maps, as well as personal information such as your default location. Other Google Maps users can see this page, except for information you've chosen to mark as private. To edit your user profile, click on My Profile at the top-right of any Google Maps page. Then click on Edit my profile. Type in your information and click Save.

16 EXPLORE THE MOON

Google's mapping ambitions extend beyond our planet. In fact, they go to the Moon. Go to www.google.com/moon to explore detailed terrain maps of the Moon in the same way you can explore Google's other maps – by clicking and dragging, and zooming in and out. The map is annotated to show where the various Apollo missions landed.

17 GET HELP

The Google Maps Help Group (<http://groups.google.com/group/Google-Maps>) is an online forum where Google Maps users meet and share questions and information. Google employees also pop up to answer questions. You can tell who they are by the blue G badge on their posts. Anyone with a question or comment is welcome to contribute, but you should read the introduction first (<http://groups.google.com/support/bin/answer.py?answer=52840>).



OTHER MAP WEBSITES

MULTIMAP

www.multimap.co.uk

Recently bought by Microsoft for a rumoured £25 million, Multimap is one of the web's longest-established map sites. It provides a generous amount of information to supplement search results, such as postcode, grid reference, coordinates and local weather forecasts. The site also includes a zoomable London Underground map, and links to partner sites where you can book a local hotel or buy A-Z maps.

Tip You'll notice small W markers at certain spots on maps. Click on one of these to generate a pop-up bubble containing information from online encyclopedia Wikipedia, plus a link to the relevant Wikipedia page.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAPMACHINE

www.nationalgeographic.com/resources/ngo/maps

This site allows you to see different information applied to your specified location, such as population density or endangered species.

Tip To see how certain issues apply to a region, first find that region on the main map, then click on More theme maps. This generates a pop-up box with a list of issues such as natural disasters or population. Click on one of these themes, then on Apply. You'll see that information overlaid on the map you searched for, or to the whole world if you didn't specify a location.

ORDNANCE SURVEY GET-A-MAP

www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/getamap

This free service enables you to find online Ordnance Survey maps by entering the place name, full postcode or National Grid reference. The location has to be covered by the Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Scale Gazetteer range of maps – that's 42,000 locations in Britain. You can print the maps or copy them to your blog or website.

Tip Maps include a pink circle, which highlights the last place name or postcode searched for. This helps you put the place in context, or find your way back to it, when you zoom out and pan around. If you'd rather get rid of the pink circle, click on the Clear button.

MAP24

www.uk.map24.com

Map24 is particularly strong as a route finder and is packed with useful features to help you get from A to B. Hover your mouse over a place of interest to see descriptive information. Right-click anywhere on the map to mark the spot with a flag. Register free to create your own maps.

Tip After generating a route map, click on the 3D view tab at the bottom of the map to see an animated simulation of your journey.

WEATHERBONK

www.weatherbonk.com

It may have a silly name, but Weatherbonk takes its job seriously. The site is based on Google Maps and Google Earth. It takes their maps and adds comprehensive global weather information, so you can navigate around the world to explore the latest weather conditions. Click on a location to generate a pop-up bubble containing temperature, wind, humidity and rain data, plus a link for a detailed forecast.

Tip For an at-a-glance five-day forecast, click on the Power maps tab at the top-right of the map window and then click on any location.

STREETMAP

www.streetmap.co.uk

This map site seems low-tech compared with Google Maps, but a new beta version indicates that Streetmap is keen to keep up with its competition. The site is particularly useful for searching in London. Type in the first three letters of a London street name and Streetmap quickly returns a list of all matching suggestions.

Tip Get the fastest results by leaving out 'road' or 'street' and just typing in the first part of a street name.

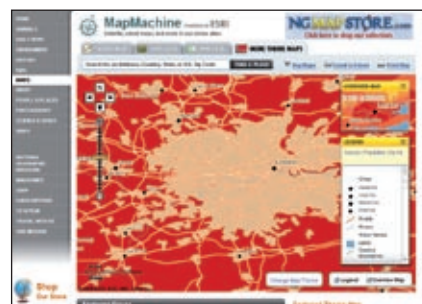
PLACEOPEDIA

www.placeopedia.com

Another Google Maps-based site, Placeopedia combines maps with thousands of encyclopedia entries from Wikipedia. Search for or navigate to your desired location, then click on any of the red placemarks to generate a pop-up bubble with a link to the relevant Wikipedia page.



▲ Animate your journey with the help of the Map24 route finder



▲ For more geographical information, use the National Geographic MapMachine

Tip Click on the Random place tab at the top of the page to go to a randomly generated location in the world, complete with Wikipedia link.

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON MAPS

www.tfl.gov.uk/gettingaround/1106.aspx

This site is a small but useful range of interactive web-based and downloadable PDF maps of the capital's public transport system. Maps include the standard Tube map, Travelcard zones and a map showing bus routes. The London Explorer map is ideal if you're visiting London, indicating accommodation, attractions and places to eat.

Tip This site lists the most popular Transport for London maps. Browse the See also menu for more maps and services including walking routes, cycle routes and a live traffic news map, as well as travel updates and maps for your mobile phone.

CIA WORLD FACTBOOK

www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook

Here you'll find a wealth of information about all the countries of the world, from national flags and population to current political issues. Content is updated every couple of months using information from US government agencies, not from the CIA itself.

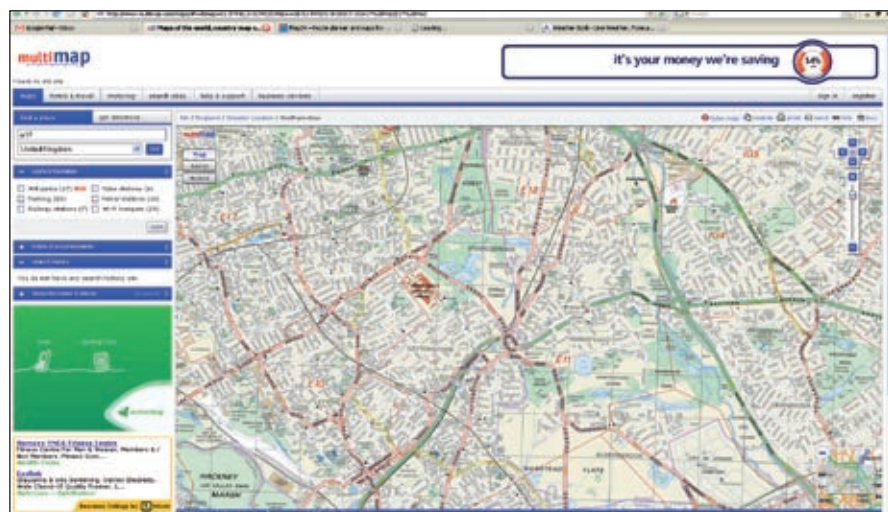
Tip Click on the Reference maps link on the homepage to see thumbnails of maps of major areas of the world. Click on a thumbnail and on Download PDF to save the map to your PC.

UFO MAPS

www.ufomaps.com

A nice time-waster based on a US map from Google Maps, this site tells you where UFOs have been spotted during the time period you select using the drop-down boxes. Click on a UFO marker to generate a pop-up containing a link to a full description of the sighting.

Tip Go to www.ufomaps.com/gadget and copy and paste the HTML code to add UFO Maps to your own website. ☞



▲ Online maps such as Multimap help you find a location and plan a journey with the minimum of fuss